



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## A PLEA FOR THE INCONSPICUOUS CHILD.

IN regard to the ideals of thoughtful parents for their children there is little variance of opinion. Our children must be well and strong; they must think clearly, act straightforwardly, and have a chivalrous care for the weak. We are also in substantial agreement as to the normal child's part in attaining these results, and as to what should be our part in our children's lives. The joyous activity, varied by moments of quiet thoughtfulness, the answering of the call of the big heroic world, and the clinging to the protective and cherishing home, all have a part of the day allotted to them, and we are here to see that they balance without strain or stagnation.

With this idea in view, we want to plead for the inconspicuous, or, shall we say, the undecorated child, begging all who have influence to lift an unnecessary burden from our children who are necessarily strained and overburdened by our complex civilization.

There are three evils arising from conspicuousness in children. The first is the injury done to the future worker through cultivation of the childish vanity which seems so innocent. We do not say to our children that we want them to be lauded for their immaculate and stylish garments or exquisite manners, but we work more for these things than for almost any of the real virtues. And the broken-down mother is usually the mother of the elaborate child. As a reward she has the exclamations of total strangers: "The beautiful child!" "What delightful manners!" or more often, "Ain't he cute!"

I have said "the future worker," for in our day all must work, or at least have a pretense of working — a pretense which is scrutinized by a sharp-sighted public more carefully, and perhaps more bitterly, every day. What is the effect on a child's quiet industry of a parent's passion for having him seen and admired? If we watch the child whose vanity is thus overfed, we shall soon know that his soul is crying out in every action against his being seen

to be admired. Moreover, what does he think, if the result is anything more than discomfort? Boy and girl think alike: "Let us dress more and have more people look at us."

Fortunately for the boy, the father steps in and says "No!" because he knows that happiness and usefulness do not come to the boy and man that way. This has not always been so. Man's instincts for self-decoration are as great as woman's, as the portraits of our male ancestors, the costumes of barbarians, and the uniforms of modern times amply testify; but from his experience he has found self-decoration incompatible with the freedom of muscular activity and the unconsciousness necessary for the best development of the boy. So the boy has not nearly the restraint of clothes, physically and spiritually, that the girl has, though the happily departed Lord Fauntleroy did darken his existence for a while.

How different it is with the girl! Her desire to be looked at is fostered to a greater or less extent by every father and mother, until the poor little soul begs for her shackles, as the little Chinese girl pleads to have the frightful bandage applied to her feet, because "other little girls have them, mother!"

Besides the nervous control on the child's part necessitated by the actual process of being dressed, she must not play so hard or she will muss or destroy an expensively made, or exquisitely laundered, dress. We are so constituted that with all the money we may have we cannot help feeling badly at seeing an expensive thing ruined. Our remarks to her, then, are calculated to render her self-conscious and restrained. And so, as a little child, healthy physical activity is denied her, and the unconscious unfolding of her mind as well, on account of the wrong construction and elaborateness of her clothes. Listen to the conversation between little girls. It is very different from that between boys—all gossip and small interests, as they walk up and down sedately in the school yard, holding on to broad flapping hats with one hand, and over-caressing the moment's best friend with the other. What else are their dear little heads occupied with when their muscles are so still? Alas, that is the root of the evil. They are planning for more admiration very often, and as they grow

up toward the high-school period they are frequently possessed with a very demon of desire for applause.

This wish to be seen and admired has resulted in girls' not only not working seriously themselves, but even in their being considered a pest by educators who have at heart the cultivation of the minds of young people, because of their incessant appeal to the boys when near them, and their constant effort to divert the boys' attention from their work to themselves. This, of course, weakens the intellectual effort of the boys, and sends the blood and force to the parts of their anatomy which should be sleeping. The plainer girls who catch the fever and have not the looks to attract, cultivate the most conspicuous mental trait, which is memorizing, the shallowest intellectual achievement. Quiet work of any kind, pursued alone for real love of it, is almost unknown among girls.

What is the solution of this problem? Sometimes the girls are caught and segregated. Eastern educators are almost unanimous in condemning co-education, and even a teacher in the Manual Training School of Chicago says: "Give me my boys free, during their working hours, from girls' influence. Their sweaters and dirty hands go with real enthusiasm, unknown among the boys of other high schools with their high collars and flashy ties and minds full of the effects they would produce on the girls. Oh, that kind is dispiriting!" And yet we western mothers are convinced that the most necessary thing in a girl's education is to know boys and more boys; and in a boy's, to know girls and more girls. For one day this wide knowledge will make a wise choice possible and a tolerant and sympathetic helpmate.

The next point I wish to make is the unnecessary and painful antagonism between boys and girls resulting from making sex conspicuous in childhood.

Wherever in the world the difference between men and women has been exaggerated by dress and custom, there has been a difference in morality that is fraught with pain for the women. This burden of grief for wives and mothers steadily decreases as we go westward from the Orient, until here in

America, where we have unconsciously obliterated many differences, we have the highest average morality, and the highest average happiness for women. This partial obliteration of differences in sex-customs has been unconscious, and I would make it conscious; yes, I would even make it a religious movement, because our little girls' welfare is involved, and the purity of our sons.

What is the temperamental difference between boys and girls that we should press our conventions down so hard, even on the baby in long dresses? Dr. Dewey says no one really knows, as the differences are so overlaid with conventions that we cannot tell what is fundamental and what is not. Would it not be a beautiful experiment to let them develop in unconscious freedom and find out? But that is a digression.

Little children who naturally know no more differences in their play than do kittens and puppies are made to learn and obey sex-conventions from the moment they go out into the world, and any slip in these conventions is greeted with scorn and laughter that bring a flush of embarrassment to their puzzled little faces.

We all know that if two children are treated differently, they will usually antagonize each other, because each feels that he must defend his treatment. Therefore, if you are with children much, you will constantly hear among them discussions as to the relative merits of boyhood and girlhood. These discussions seem trivial, even when big brothers and sisters, and fathers and mothers, share in them; but they are not trivial. It is not trivial to hurt the feelings of a child by telling him that sex restricts his activities, when there is no reason for such restrictions; nor is it without serious results that we set our boys and girls against each other, instead of holding them close in sympathy. Moreover, if boys and girls were always together in childhood, when that attraction comes that is characteristic of adolescence, there would not be so painful a readjustment to the new force as there is now, when they begin their youth with so few experiences in common, and antagonistic sets of conventions. The irritation of these childhood conditions is more severe in the case of the girl,

because there are more actual restraints for her. How often is the physical redundancy that is sexless repressed by scornful or chiding elders, when a little girl is told she cannot share those beautiful outdoor activities with her brothers when she is grown! A healthy little girl does not see enough movement in indoor life. And in order to encourage her natural craving for the freer life outdoors I believe in resurrecting all the old stories of heroic womanhood, when little girls are in their heroic mood, and quietly downing the big boy's scorn with them. Is not the burden of a woman's life heavy enough to demand our most serious consideration as to her preparation for it? Should not her childhood be quiet and serene, with much muscular activity, and a divine thirst for knowledge cultivated that will keep her mind and body too busy for her to sink into the petty life of most of our girls?

Of course, I shall be criticised for making girls into boys — as if that were possible. Oh, the dear, attractive, boyish little girl! How her father loves her, and how sound and sweet she is! What real child-lover admires the prematurely feminine product with her airs and graces? She is, indeed, a sad sight to those who wish her well. Still we cannot put all boy's clothes on girls, and thus keep the human young together in their work and play. I wish we could. Why should we tell the sexes apart before they realize that they have a sex? But we can more nearly approach the boy's healthful spirit in our girl's clothing.

I was criticized, too, some time ago, for wanting to reduce all girls' apparel to a dead level of monotony and allowing mothers no originality. But look at the boys and their fathers — all wearing hats, coats, and trousers alike. Are they not individuals to us? And are they not handsome to us? What mother of boys believes them to be less beautiful than girls? The human young, like all other young, possess the charm of childhood. It does not need a gold frame to attract us. Pictures nowadays are almost always framed severely. This same soberness and severity in clothing throws childish beauty into high relief — and the child does not know it, as our boys testify. Then, when we let them choose their own bit of color in sweater or tie, and keep our wicked and inartistic hands off, we have tampered with nature's sweet and holy product as little as may be.

What would be the result of an atmosphere free from sex-antagonism, free from childish vanity? Should we have the "Vampire" who tramples on all human ties to get her will of men, or the hard-faced fighting woman? I think not. It would be our high-spirited and clean-souled American girl—the most attractive girl in the world.

My third point is the immorality of the display in dress of our social position and wealth.

One day I said to a ten-year-old boy: "Would you like to dress in your Sunday suit and ride your new bicycle down where little boys have no Sunday suits and bicycles?" "Yes, I would," he answered naively, and flushed as he added: "I know it is not very nice, but I would like to do it." Of course, I blessed him for his frankness, and for the fact that he saw his position was wrong.

Our country is a democracy, and democracy is another word for Christianity, as far as the neighbor is concerned. Do we love our neighbor as we should when we flaunt our wealth before his tired eyes and cultivate in our children and others a desire to do likewise? And aren't too much cleanliness, too much order, too much manners, too much good English, questionable ethics in this regard? If there results from them undemocratic priggishness, and a feeling of superior social position, their value is certainly to be doubted. The boy who wants to show off his Sunday suit and bicycle becomes, perhaps, the man who for the sake of social prestige feels he must belong to clubs whose luxuries he cannot afford, or have wealth to exhibit in other inglorious ways. Is it not strange that there are not more anarchists, and bullying labor leaders, whose desire it is to get even with people who spend money so heartlessly in display before the poor and suffering? Is it our fault that they do not rise up and destroy us, as some of them would?

What is to be done? Fortunately for my hopes, I am not a voice crying in the wilderness. The feeling against complex lives for children is rising with gratifying rapidity; and, joy of joys, simple clothing for children is even becoming fashionable.

Miss Addams says the wealthy are the standardizing class.

What they do is followed, to the extent of their purses, by all the rest of the world, all the way down to the poorest slum-dweller. The less money there is to follow in your footsteps with, the greater the strain, and the greater the sacrifice of the really important things—nourishment, sunshine, cleanliness, order. Therefore, for the sake of the children we influence, as well as for all other little children, would it not be worth while to select with greater persistency than ever the simple, durable clothing, and have our children a little below the average display, rather than above, since they must mingle with their fellows? Unadorned, sweet, and clean childhood appeals to all child-lovers; and we wish none but child-lovers to notice our children. Let us build a wall of inconspicuousness about our young people's lives. Let them not appear too much in public places; and then when they do appear let them be so mouse-colored that no one will make vulgar remarks about them to rob them of their greatest charm, unconsciousness. And let us invite to meet them only people like the old Jewish lady Miss Addams told me about riding through the slums with. At almost every group of children the dear old lady would lean forward and say: "Ach Gott!" That is the type of people we should surround our children with; they do not spoil with that kind of love.

A noble use of wealth of any sort is to lift the burden from the weak and helpless. We can do that by helping to make clothing fashionable that is not a burden to the child, nor to the purse of the parent. At every purchase of clothes, at every birthday or Christmas celebration, at every question of theaters, down-town events, luxuries, and allowances, let us ask ourselves two important questions: Will confirming these conventions separate my boys from my girls in any way? and, Will confirming these conventions lay a heavier burden on all children and their mothers? And if upon the painful demands of our more or less contaminated children for more luxuries we gently remind them of the people who need the money more than they do, it is usually enough. Not always, but sometimes, we must be stern parents.

FRANCES CRANE LILLIE.